Newsletter of **The Friends of Plummer's Hollow** **Vol. 1 Issue 1 • Autumn 2026**

The Screech Owl

Hoots from the Hollow **www.plummershollow.com**



Illustration by Michael Kensinger



Photo by Dave Bonta



Illustrated by Michael Kensinger

Ghost Bird

By Marcia Bonta

It's a cold, crisp morning in early November. Robins call and sing in the sunlit treetops at the edge of First Field. As I head down our woodland road, first one and then a second common raven flies low and "bonks."

Above Waterthrush Bench I hear the continual ticking of songbirds near or in a medium-sized hemlock tree

cont'd on pg 2

New Friends of Plummer's Hollow Group Begins

By Amy Christina



September 13 marked the start of the *Friends of Plummer's Hollow* group, when the first meeting took place both in-person and via *Zoom* to brainstorm and discuss a vision for future use and preservation of the 648-acre property.

"We'll give everyone a chance to (talk about) their

cont'd on pg 8

What's Causing the Spicebush Die-Back?

By Dave Bonta



Spicebush (Lindera benzoin) is a plant we nearly always point out on guided walks, inviting participants to crush a leaf or berry to smell the allspice flavor. Its leaves turn a mellow gold in autumn. Native-plant enthusiasts have begun planting it as part of food forests (as at Fort

cont'd on pg 4

A Walk in Penn's Woods

Learning from Deer Exclosures

By Amy Christina



Local naturalist and property co-owner Dave Bonta led a group October 4 of about 10 people on a hike throughout the Bonta's 648-acre property in Tyrone, Pennsylvania to learn about White-tailed Deer exclosures. Designed to protect a natural landscape from over-foraging, exclosures allow for the growth

cont'd on pg 10

across the stream. In the still sunless hollow, I look and look and still can't see any little bird, yet the ticking continues.

Finally, I give up and am about to walk away, muttering about my aging eyes, when I notice what appears to be an odd-shaped piece of wood on a lower branch of the hemlock. Slowly, I raise my binoculars and peer at it. To my great delight and astonishment, a barred owl seems to be looking at me except that its eyes are closed. I speak to it and its eyes blink open. For long minutes we stare at each other. Then I move on, and the barred owl remains on its perch, seemingly unperturbed by the human who has interrupted its sleep.

Still marveling at its calm demeanor and superb camouflage, I wonder how many times I have not seen a barred owl in our forest. If not for the ticking birds, I would have continued on my walk, unaware that what I think of as the "ghost bird," was nearby.

I remember our first year here back in 1971 when a barred owl sat in full view on a branch beside our road throughout the summer months. We didn't realize then that the owl would be only a memory for years to come. We often saw or heard eastern screech-owls and great horned owls but never the "who cooks for you, who cooks for you'all" of barred owls. After all, great horned owls are major predators on the slightly smaller barred owls. So are raccoons, larger members of the weasel family, and large hawks, all of which live and hunt in our hollow.

Still, we do have ideal barred owl habitat — a mature mixed deciduous and coniferous forest on either side of a small stream along our hollow road. The barred owl's favorite food items — small mammals and birds — are also plentiful, especially chipmunks, deer and white-footed mice, as well as birds up to and including ruffed grouse in size.

Knowing all this, I expected to see more barred owls in the hollow. Instead, my absolutely best sighting took place about 20 years ago in the ice-enshrouded woods of Sapsucker Ridge one January afternoon, well within the more than square mile of territory a barred owl pair needs to survive the winter. Two inch long icicles hung from every tree branch and vine that gray, cold, misty day.

This time an American crow was the messenger, cawing and flying up from the trees ahead. Scanning the area it had just vacated with my binoculars, I spotted a large, plump figure perched on a tree limb a hundred feet away. I thought it was a great horned owl because crows had often alerted me to them. Instead, I was surprised by a barred owl — a puffy vision decked out in white, gray, and brown feathers, its horizontal barring around its collared neck accounting for its common name.

It turned its head back and forth on its swivel neck, then bent and peered down at the ground, no doubt hoping to surprise a mouse. I knelt, one knee in the icy snow, and studied the owl for ten minutes, admiring its nearly rounded-off, soft-looking head framed with what looked like enormous fur muffs, and its dark brown eyes accentuated by large, oval facial disks.

At last it turned its back to me, and I could see some black mixed with brown on its stubby tail before it leaned out and slightly down and launched into silent flight, propelling itself out of my sight.

Standing upright at 18 inches, a barred owl weighs a mere 1.5 pounds and its rounded wings stretch 40 inches. Among the owl species, only great horned owls are larger than barred owls in the eastern United States.

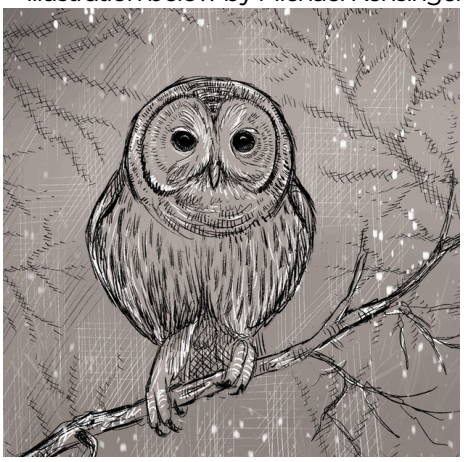
Once barred owls (Strix varia) resided east of the Great Plains from the boreal forest of Canada to southern Florida, but recently they have expanded into portions of western North America, including the Pacific Northwest where sometimes they displace and hybridize with the closely related and much rarer spotted owls (Strix occidentalis).

They are supposed to prefer large trees in old forests for nesting, and here in Pennsylvania barred owls do inhabit wooded ravines and "nest in highest densities in old-growth forests of the High Plateau," according to Gerald McWilliams and Daniel Brauning in The Birds of Pennsylvania. But they are also found in forested swamps, wet, mature woodlands, and even in cities and farmlands. Although



Photo above by Connor Schmitt, one of three Barred Owlets seen by many, just this past June 2026 in the hollow!

Illustration below by Michael Kensinger



they are less abundant than great horned owls and eastern screech-owls, they breed in every Pennsylvania County except Philadelphia.

Barred owls need large trees with cavities for nesting but will use old hawk, crow or squirrel nests too. They will even nest in nest boxes on occasion, such as the barred owl that nested in a box in Loyalville, Luzerne County, McWilliams and Brauning report. Even though they sometimes reuse the same nest for as long as ten years, they have been known to alternate occupancy one year or several years with red-shouldered, red-tailed and Cooper's hawks and great horned owls in so-called "partnership" nests.

Barred owls also like to inhabit a forest with an open understory because it makes hunting easier for them. In addition, the closed canopy of an old-growth forest provides more regulated temperatures as well as protection from excessive mobbing by small birds. But often they remain attached to an area even as it changes around them, for instance, even s taying in a

cont'd below on pg 3.

Ghost Bird, cont'd



Photo above by Connor Schmitt

The Morning Porch

Daily short takes from an Appalachian hollow

By Dave Bonta

October 26, 2026

With most of the forest understorey bare, one can see so much more through the trees: a full moon setting in the west, a flock of geese, the white tail of a deer retreating like a ghost into the dark mountain laurel bushes.

October 25, 2026

Clear and cold. A few minutes before sunrise, with crows already noising about, a pair of screech owls start duetting up on the ridge, fierce high tremolos descending into tender trills.

To subscribe to Dave's blog, go to: www.morningporch.com

woods while it's being logged.

If there is enough food, both the larger female and the male of a pair will inhabit their 695-acre-or-more territory all year. They are presumed to be monogamous and even though they call throughout the year, they call more frequently prior to egg-laying in late winter and early spring. That's when you are most likely to hear dueting between a pair lasting two minutes and consisting not only of their familiar hooting but "loud and prolonged outbursts of cackling, laughing, and whooping sounds delivered very rapidly and interspersed, as well as ending, with the familiar 'ho-hoo-ah,'" Massachusetts ornithologist William Brewster once wrote, adding a reference to "a prolonged and cat-like scream." It's enough to frighten naïve campers into thinking a mountain lion is nearby.

Regarding their courtship rites, Edward Forbush, writing in Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States, recounts how a pair of barred owls perched in low branches over his campfire and "nodded and bowed with half-spread wings, and wobbled and twisted their heads from side to side, meantime uttering the most weird and uncouth sounds imaginable."

The female barred owl lays two to three white eggs as early as December in Florida and March and early April in Pennsylvania. She also incubates the eggs from 28 to 33 days while the male brings her food. After the eggs hatch, the female broods the altricial young for two weeks and the male delivers the food at the nest in a bill-to-bill exchange with the female. Then she tears up the food and feeds it to their nestlings. She also does a little hunting on her own, but after two weeks of brooding, she does a lot more hunting. Both parents then drop food into the nest and the nestlings are able to eat it by themselves.

When the nestlings are between four and five weeks old, they leave the nest but they can't fly. They either perch on the nest rim or they climb trees or branches by using their beaks and talons, grasping the bark in their beaks and walking their feet up the trunk while flapping their wings. At ten weeks old, they can make short flights and gradually lengthen those flights.

The fledglings stay together and near the nest site for awhile and the adults continue to feed them. That's when Tom Kuehl, president of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology, first learned of a nesting pair near his Murrysville, Westmoreland County home. As he wrote in PSO Pileated, the excellent newsletter of the Society, "I walked out our side door at 6:00 a.m. [in late May]… as I made my way around the house, I started hearing loud hissing noises… I looked up and in spite of many leaves, I quickly found three fledgling Barred Owls… For the next two weeks we [his wife Janet and he] enjoyed the dawn and dusk hissing and antics of the fledgling Barred Owls. More active at dusk, they performed flights across the yard, tree to ground, then tree to tree as darkness approached." The Kuehls never did see the parents, although Janet was scolded by an adult when she tried to walk on their woods' trail.

Most documented young barred owls disperse a mile – 38 miles from their nest site, but one young barred owl banded in Nova Scotia in 1999 was recaptured in January 2000, 960 miles away.

Unlike many bird species, Breeding Bird Surveys from 1966 to 1996 showed a slight increase in barred owl numbers. But that was 15 years ago. Since then the opening and fragmenting of forests has increased in Pennsylvania, providing habitat for the more aggressive great horned owls. In addition to too many roads that have fragmented our habitat for decades, we now must contend with industrial wind farms fragmenting our remaining intact mountaintops and natural gas well pads doing the same in our state forests and parks. Add to that the death of our state tree — the hemlock — from the hemlock wooly adelgids, which destroy the most common conifer in our mixed forest. All of these factors bode ill not only for barred owls but for all the creatures and plants that thrive in mixed coniferous/deciduous unfragmented forests.

What's Causing the Spicebush Die-Back?

cont'd from page 1, by Dave Bonta



Roberdeau County Park) or just for landscaping. But some years it struggles: more and more leaves shrivel up, and the next year it might not leaf out at all, or maybe just one branch, and eventually it either dies or resprouts from the roots. What's going on?

On September 13, we had a visit from Pennsylvania's chief Forest Pathologist, Jill Rose, accompanied by Gina Berger, another member of DCNR's Division of Forest Health, who were collecting samples of diseased spicebush leaves as part of a state-wide study. Naturally, we took the opportunity to pepper them with questions about other tree and shrub species battling exotic pests and diseases, too. Rose was a font of information, but like any true scientist was cautious, noting how little we actually know in many instances.

With spicebush specifically, the periodic die-back that we observe seems linked to moisture and humidity, since the anthracnose species apparently causing the die-back thrives in damp conditions, and may be countered, Jill noted, by pruning out lower branches to increase air-flow. Then why, we wondered, have we seen so much die-back in dry years, while this growing season, one of the wettest we've ever seen, the spicebush has thrived?

The only hypothesis we could come up with—which Jill didn't shoot down—was that the past three years, dry as they were, also saw an explosion in stiltgrass, which now covers more than 100 acres in the hollow, I'd guess, and as anyone who's hiked through the stuff knows, it can hold moisture from a morning shower, or even heavy dew, well into the afternoon. Stiltgrass favors the same geology and hydrology as the spicebush, so it seems reasonable to suppose it might be creating moist microclimates that favor the disease. But this year, with all the rain, spicebush is simply growing too damn fast for the anthracnose to completely decimate it.

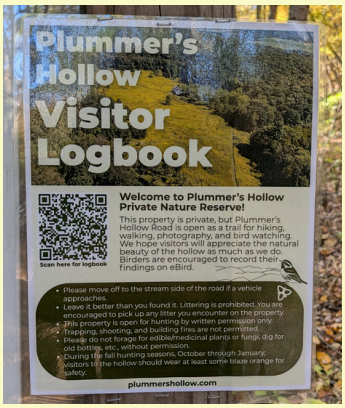
That's my theory, at any rate. A few weeks after her visit, Jill told us in an email, "I did isolate Colletotrichum (anthracnose) from the spicebush samples that I collected. There are a few Fusarium cultures as well which I anticipated. But the decline/mortality we observed in Plummer's Hollow and the cultures from the samples are in keeping with what we observed in other areas across the state."

Jill explained as we walked around that many native trees and shrubs have a species of anthracnose fungus adapted to them, and that's the most common cause of leaf spots, aside from autumnal senescence. Mountain laurel and black gum were two examples she mentioned. Both species, incidentally, seem nearly leaf-spot-free at the moment. Given that every one of the black gums had to re-leaf after their first attempt was destroyed by frost, again I would have to credit the summer's ideal growing conditions. With the mountain laurel, there's a more complex situation involving decades-long cycles of growth and die-back, clone by clone, which I don't think anyone really understands yet. But after seeing its leaves look worse and worse for most of this century, I've been thrilled to see so few spots on the new growth. Nature is full of surprises!

As for the spicebush, Jill gave me a new perspective: Rather than worry too much over any individual bush, we just need to ensure that new ones are able to sprout and "dead" ones to re-sprout, and the best way we can do that is by keeping the deer herd low. Throughout the nineties and the first two decades of this century, I've been putting up little fences around every spicebush that appeared around the houses, which is also the head of Plummer's Hollow Run—ideal spicebush habitat. Now that years of good hunting and chronic wasting disease have shrunk the deer herd a little, I no longer have to do that, and the bushes I've protected have become a seed source for many more. Another population below Eric's house has had its ups and downs but appears to be holding steady. Folks with smaller acreages would probably be well advised to take a more proactive approach and try to protect individual bushes by increasing air-flow around them, as Jill suggests. But it's important to remember that ecological constraints such as anthracnose play a valuable role in keeping native species from becoming invasive and crowding everything else out.

Please Scan New QR Code Upon Entry to Plummer's Hollow

All visitors to the hollow are now asked to scan the QR Code posted at the kiosk upon entering the property.



"It only takes about 20 seconds to do," says Eric Oliver, caretaker, explaining how it's important for collecting data, as well as making the owners aware of your presence. "It's a safety issue too," he adds, in case someone gets lost or has a medical issue during their visit to the hollow.

The Hollow King: A Year in the Life of a Pennsylvania Black Bear

By Michael Kensinger

Deep in the bottom of the ol' hollow, beneath the roots of a fallen hemlock, a black bear lies still—his breathing so slow it can barely be noticed. His body, covered in thick black fur, is curles tightly in the cradle of the downed tree. Outside his shelter, the forest sleeps, aside from the chatter of chickadees and titmice. Inside, a bear dreams.

This is no cub. This black bear is celebrating his fifth winter. He has known the flavor of summer's huckleberries, the sound of gunshots, and the staccato gobble of wild turkeys that share his woodland home. He knows it all. As a full-grown boar, he is heavy with fat, his jet-black coat gleaming like coal as a rare beam of January sunlight kisses his fur.

Winter

While our bruin sleeps, his metabolism slows to a crawl. With his heart beating as few as eight times a minute, he is truly a woodland wonder. For the bear, this is hibernation. His torpor is not the same as that of the groundhog, but it is a unique adaptation that allows him to survive the months when food is scarce. From time to time, he briefly rouses to scratch an itch—but mostly, he sleeps.

The world outside is much quieter in winter—except for the yapping coyotes on the ridgetop. Or the faint hoots of a great horned owl near the old logging road. Snow-laden trees bow in winter's solemn darkness, while a raven squawks high above the canopy.

Spring

As March rolls around, the first real thaws begin, and the leaf litter begins to feel some warmth. Of course, cold snaps are far from over, but the breaks in the weather are enough to get the sap flowing in the sugar maples, and the first calls of wood frogs rise from the thawed vernal pools of Plummer's Hollow. With each passing week, the weather warms faintly—with occasional jolts back to winter before finally settling into a more consistent pattern of warmth.

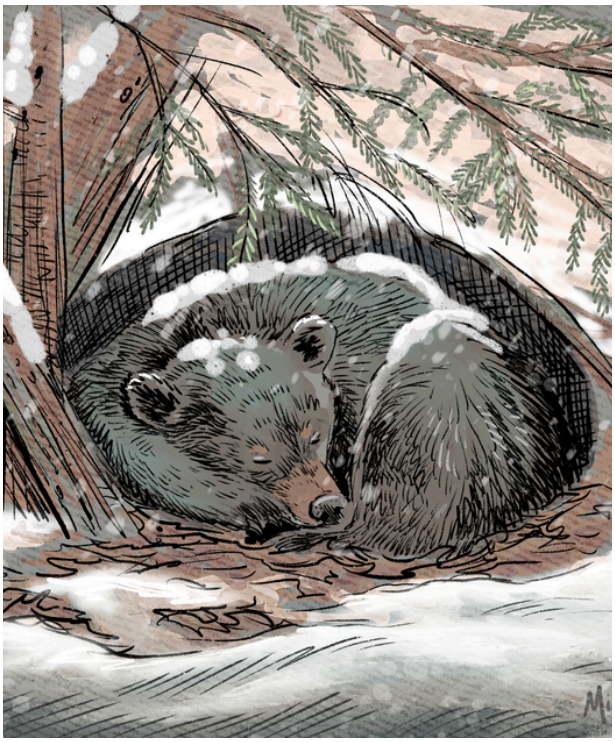
Our bear emerges groggily, his belly grumbling for food. He stays fairly close to his den while gathering nutrition and building himself back up. Using his hooked claws, he paws at decaying logs, hoping for grubs and other insects. Clusters of green grass, fresh buds, and just about anything green he can find become food.

As April grows bold, so does he. Deer carcasses, revealed by the snowmelt, offer an easy meal. So do trout carcasses along the banks and, sometimes, a careless squirrel. For a bear, opportunism is survival.

Summer

By May, life has become much easier. Food availability increases dramatically, and a barrage of songbirds passes through the woods around him for the first time in a long time. Scarlet tanagers, warblers, and perhaps the best singer of all—the wood thrush—have returned. One has to wonder if they bring the bear a sense of peace, as they do so many people.

Wildflowers abound, fungi fruit more heavily, and in just a few weeks, the forest goes from



Illustrations by Michael Kensinger





Summer, cont'd...



sparsely vegetated to full-on forest mode. It seems everyone is starting to raise families. The great horned owl's owlets peer down from the boughs of an eastern white pine at the bear as he flips rocks in a creek bed.

As June approaches, love is definitely in the air—and its scent is irresistible.

Now is the time of movement. Our bear expands his range widely and begins traversing the hillsides, ridges, and meadows in search of love. Skirting the old shed, he dips down through another hollow, crossing creeks and avoiding properties with noisy dogs. By night, he moves like a ghost. By day, he is generally not seen at all. He is like a shadow.

By July, berry season is in full swing, with blueberries ripening and berry patches far too good to ignore. Our bear gorges himself in the brush, plucking clusters of berries from the limbs with astonishing grace. He is a true connoisseur of berries, and he was likely dreaming of this while he slept in winter's embrace.

Around one field and into another, the bear realizes he is not alone. A sow and her cubs are also foraging here, and he gives them a wide berth. She is cantankerous when it comes to her cubs, and for good reason. Some boars will attack and kill cubs if given the chance. He has no interest, however, and gives them space. There is plenty of food around at this time of year.

In his travels, our bear finally picks up the trail of a receptive female—one without cubs. Her scent is carried on the wind, and before long, he finds it laced through damp footprints beside a nearby puddle.

Their courtship is brief—a few days of tolerance, of companionship almost tender. Then they part. If their mating results in cubs, they won't be born until deep winter.

Fall

As late summer gives way to fall, black cherries, hickory nuts, and acorns offer a changing menu. The forest becomes a feast. This is hyperphagia—feeding to survive the winter. The bear eats nearly nonstop, packing on the fat that will sustain him. He grows massive.

He leaves claw marks high on beech trunks and digs out yellowjacket nests, enduring their stings for a taste of nutritious larvae.

He hears distant gunshots—first a trickle, then a torrent. By late November, the woods blaze orange with vests and hats. It is bear season. He avoids the easy trails now. He moves through dense laurel and steep draws, navigating wind and scent. His feet, wide and soft-soled, find old game trails where even coyotes think twice.

He survives.

Winter Again

As December comes on, the bear finds a new den—an old root mass beneath a tipped pine, half-filled with leaves. He circles, digs, lies down, and curls into a tight ball.

His breath slows. Snow falls.

In the still silence of the hollow, beneath the laurel and pine, the bear sleeps again—his muscles at rest, his story not yet finished. And somewhere across the valley, a sow settles into her den, her growing young hidden within.

The cycle turns, and the hollow king waits for spring once more.

Bird Mountain

By Mark Bonta

On September the first at 6 AM it's a near-suffocating 70 degrees, bugs heavy and horrendous. They worsen with a little light, particularly in the best spots for birds, just off the edge of the Sapsucker tangles around the powerline. Katydids grind on and then die away not long after the top of the hour, and are replaced by a distant Great Horned Owl, the first in forever, and a faint Eastern Whip-poor-will

Later, a rare early swallow flight, a few Barns and Northern Rough-wingeds coursing south along the ridgetop on a low breeze through the buggy gloom. As it turns out, the rough-wings will be the only ones recorded in the county for the entire month. By seven up in the tangled black cherry and grapevine canopy, a tropical feeding flock takes shape with not much more than ten days left until a big contingent of frugivores and insectivores abandons us. An early Philadelphia Vireo hangs tight with a Red-eyed Vireo group, and a female Purple Finch, loosely associated with some House Finches, perches on a snag for a minute or two and warbles a few bars.

Severe thunderstorms and stagnation keep birds down for the next few days. Thursday night, winds shift to west-northwest and a few hundred thousand migrants force their way over the county.

To read the rest of this column, go to Mark's blog on Substack, Bird Mountain www.markbonta.substack.com

and sign up for a free subscription to receive monthly reports on bird activity in Plummer's Hollow and adjacent stretch of the LIttle Juniata.



Photo by Mark Bonta

New Friends of Plummer's Hollow Group Begins, cont'd from page 1

ideas as far as what a *Friends Group* might do, and go over some of the current issues we're facing," Mark Bonta said, starting the meeting off by introducing himself and offering a brief history of the property, and how it was established as a family trust.

He talked about how the group might work in conjunction with the owners (himself and wife, Paola, and daughter, Eva), brothers Dave and Steve, mother, Marcia; as well as caretaker, Eric Oliver.

People could lead various educational and environmental programs on the property, Mark said, depending on individual interests and backgrounds. He expressed his hope to have a single coordinated calendar of events that everyone could refer to, and also how, at a later date, officers could be appointed into different roles within the group.

"My own personal vision for the future is to have some sort of environmental center," said Mark, which could be used both for educational purposes and as a venue that could be rented out for various functions.

Caretaker Eric Oliver offered his input next.

"I'm one person and if I have to do everything myself on 700 acres it can get a little cumbersome," said Eric Oliver, caretaker, " so having a little bit of help like we did last weekend (when volunteers spent several hours removing invasive weeds) is always much appreciated!"

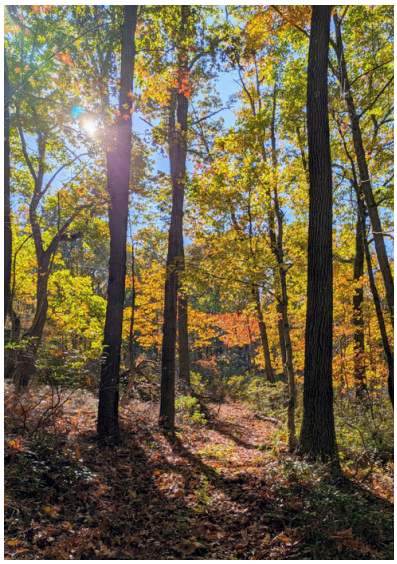
He spoke further how he thinks inviting small groups onto the property, to see what it offers, by letting them experience it through educational trips and tours, is paramount.

"The idea is to plant seeds so that people can come to understand the importance of living naturally (and preserving our local environment)," he said, further explaining how many people he speaks with, both in Tyrone and beyond, never knew it existed. "We really just need to showcase it as the gem it really is," he added.

"I've appreciated opportunities to visit (Plummer's Hollow)," said retired elementary and middle school principal, Donnan Stoicovy, mentioning how she brought the master naturalists group to the property the past four years, and how she helped with the task of pulling up the invasive *stiltgrass*. "I was even there for when the *Big Boy* passed by, it's just a very special place, and I'll do whatever I can to help," she added.

Local business woman Megan Mills, also in attendance, talked about her love for both botany and birdwatching, and how she grew up hunting and camping in an outdoorsman-oriented family.





"I like creating curiosity in other people," she said, "and I think we should all do everything we can to make the world a better place for all the species that exist here."

She spoke further about the importance of showing people what a native ecosystem should look like, and why it's important, and getting them excited about it.

Retired educator Susan Braun talked about her experience with Plummer's Hollow and visiting the property with the master's naturalist group, further expressing her passion for environmental education and teaching people how to identify specific species of native plants and birds.

"We all need to become aware of what's around us," she said. "I'm just glad to be a part of this (start up group) and it's just really exciting."

Local librarian Lana Conrad, of the Tyrone Public Library, was also in attendance.

"I just want to be a part of the legacy and the longevity of the mission," said Conrad, who also spoke about the importance of environmental education. "I also want to help put safeguards in place for the use of the land moving forward."

Dave Bonta, who walks the property every day, talked about the large collection of nature books the family already has, pointing out how they could be catalogued and used for a future library in an environmental education center.

Juniata Valley Audubon Society President Connor Schmitt talked about his love for birdwatching and others encouraged him to lead future bird walks on the property.

Mark spoke further about the historical aspect of bringing people together on "an original farmstead from the 1800's," further speaking about the Quakers who built it, the original iron mine, and various traits of the property from a geological and archaeological perspective.

Anyone wishing to get involved with the *Friends Group* or learn more can email plummershollow@gmail.com.

A Visit to Plummer's Hollow

An Essay, By Sara Lada

Hundreds and hundreds of acres of forest rise and receive. This land receives sound be it a trickling brook, the drone of interstate, the cracking of tree limbs, night-song, chainsaw, and train-song. This land receives thousands of birds' feet upon bough and rock. It receives migration paths, fox kits, acorns, footfalls, and briars. Plummer's Hollow is a 648-acre preserve of what it receives and conceives. Owned and cared for by the Bonta family, this land has been managed and loved by a librarian, a naturalist, a linguist, a poet, and a geographer. Sounds like the type of people who should be sent into space, right? But in this space, a family grew and some stayed.

I remember how I first discovered the hollow. Driving one day, I saw a one-lane bridge crossing the river and seemingly entering the woods. A wormhole, I thought to myself. I have always been drawn to wormholes into the woods. One day, I decided to drive across it and connected the dots. People came here to park and fish in the river. But the dirt road kept going. I got out of my car and followed it. I crossed train tracks and came to a gate. I didn't see any No Trespassing signs and an obvious path went around the gate, so I went around the gate as well. I discovered that the dirt road went up and up, a stream to the left and a steep bank to the right. Flowers, ferns, and other plants all around. I eventually came to a trailhead kiosk with brochures for what I learned was Plummer's Hollow. The brochures mentioned writer-naturalist Marcia Bonta and suddenly neurons fired in my brain. Not too long before this discovery, I had gone to a library book sale and purchased several books written by her. It all connected. This was the place.

And it still is. I have visited many times since and have become acquainted with Marcia and her son Dave. I have grown to admire them almost to the point of feeling voyeuristic, reading their books, following Dave's online projects, and being inspired by them.

On the first day of June, I decided to visit the hollow and its ridges after two failed attempts to do so in recent weeks due to a stopped train blocking the road. I arrived at 12:15 and it was 71 degrees and sunny. I immediately felt how dry the ground was beneath my feet and rain won't be coming any day soon. I started up the First Field Trail where one encounters a fenced-in enclosure to prevent deer-browsing. I immediately heard an ominous cranking sound but I figured it to be the sound of a tree moving in the breeze.

Along the path, I encountered Hay-scented Fern and jewelweed not yet in bloom. cinquefoil also dotted the path like drops of yellow paint. Red-eyed Vireo, Indigo Bunting, and American Redstart announced my presence. An Eastern Towhee skittered about the forest floor, lifting leaves in search for something. Then I heard the cycling of a Yellowthroat calling its own name and the Hooded Warbler replying *you are who you say you are!*

Lover of portals that I am, I came to the grapevine portal. What a massive beauty, right?

I eventually came to an entry door for the enclosure so I went in and was immediately greeted by Witch Hazel. A very impressive oak tree (red, I believe?) stood tall and handsome.

Back on the trail, I admire haircap moss and come across a plant growing right in the middle of the path. I have identified it as richweed but it is also known as citronella horsebalm. It can grow to be quite tall and once I saw this one, I saw many others as I kept going.

And then suddenly I came to my first batch of bloomed Mountain Laurel of the season. Their flowers make it easy for pollinators considering that they possess a mechanism that blasts pollinators with pollen.

Sometimes I love how flowers look before they bloom. Like when a Sunflower's petals are still covering its face. I love how Mountain Laurel flowers look like dollops of frosting, created by the graceful hand of a premier baker. The bloomed flower is beautiful, of course. A Yellow-throated Vireo whistled in the woods as I admired the flowers.



Photos by Amy Christina



As I approached near the top of the first field, I heard a Pileated Woodpecker knocking on Sapsucker Ridge, the ridge that faces the town of Tyrone. At this point, acorns are strewn all over the trail and moss creeps along on trailside rocks. I eventually make a right to make my visit to the top of the First Field where a grove of spruces provide a dark shade in comparison with the bright sunlit landscape adjacent to it. As I stepped into the sun of the field, it would be the Field Sparrow of course that sang to me first. I could still hear the Pileated Woodpecker in the distance. One of the best views in

cont'd below on pg 9

Barn Owl, Audubon Plate CLXXI

By Noah Davis



Do you see me as foxes see stars,
above and blinking?
Or have we eaten enough meals together
to know we're both ghosts
of this river valley whose current we've learned
to speak,
our voices sending skulls back over
our tongues?

For more info visit: Write Place (first published above poem)
www.writeplace.org/noah-davis or www.noahdaviswriter.com

Sleep

By Todd Davis



On the ridge above Skelp Road
bears binge on blackberries and apples,
even grapes, knocking down
the Petersens' arbor to satisfy the sweet
hunger that consumes them. Just like us
they know the day must come when
the heart slows, when to take one
more step would mean the end of things
as they should be. Sleep is a drug;
dreams its succor. How better to drift
toward another world but with leaves
falling, their warmth draping us,
our stomachs full and fat with summer?

For more info visit: www.todddavispoet.com or
www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/todd-davis

Golden-winged Warbler in Plummer's Hollow Run, below, photographed 9/5/2026, by Connor Schmitt.



Plummers Hollow is at the top of the First Field. I stood and admired the view.and then promptly sneezed four times. There's nothing like a good ole sneeze in a bright, sunny, open landscape.

An Indigo Bunting responded to my sneeze. Eventually, a Black-capped Chickadee, Cedar Waxwing, and Red-eyed Vireo joined in. During last year's Cicada Brood XIV, I came up here to look for 17-year Cicadas. I found some in this spot but saw even more in the Far Field, which I did not explore during this visit. I continued walking toward Sapsucker Ridge, following the knocks of the Pileated Woodpecker. I approached what I think was a grove of Black Locust trees, their canopies lacy and sparse, allowing a lot of light for the understory where dogbane and ferns grew. I entered the shade of forest, passed what appeared to be somebody's walking stick,

and came to the reflecting pond. A still pond that reflects while also providing a nice, shady place in which to reflect. A trail cam focused on a fallen log that crosses the pond. From here, the traffic on the below interstate was more prevalent. Other vernal pools dotted the landscape nearby, insects skittering across their surfaces. I walked through some Japanese stiltgrass and approached the edge of the ridge to look down at Tyrone.

Time to turn around. I wanted to explore Laurel Ridge on the other side today. Sapsucker Ridge will be another day. I never did see the Pileated Woodpecker.

Laurel Ridge Trail is intermittently sunny and the path is covered in moss. And of course its namesake was everywhere. As soon as I got on the trail, I spooked some Ovenbirds. A squirrel clicked at me. I heard more woodpecker drumming to the south as I walked along the trail. I apologized to a lot of spiders as I accidentally walked through webs and ducked under them. On this ridge, I walked through thermals where if I were a raptor, I'd float on them.

Bracken ferns and Chestnut Oak saplings greeted me on the trail, as well. A chorus of drumming, the Blue-headed Vireo, and Eastern Wood Pewee graced the air. I continued downslope as an American Goldfinch chuckled at me. To my right, Sinking Valley lay bright and green below the ridge, in the distance. I eventually heard a Northern Flicker. From my experiences in the hollow, when I hear a Northern Flicker, I know I'm near Marcia's house. I am fascinated by the geographies of wandering, noticing, and discovery.

To view the full article, go to Sara's blog: www.broadleaf.substack.com



A Walk in Penn's Woods

Learning from Deer Exclosures,

cont'd from pg 1

and regeneration of native plants and trees.

"Deer, especially when they're really hungry in February or March, will eat almost anything that's green," Dave explained, while showing the group a large three-acre exclosure that was erected back in 2001 after the success of a much smaller exclosure out near Far Field.

For the Bontas, the three-acre exclosure (one of the entrances, below right) serves mainly as a baseline to assess the success or failure of the deer hunting program on the property.

"Because of the rocky soil, we had to hammer all of the posts into the ground by hand with a sledgehammer," he said, recalling the difficult task.

When deer populations get too high, he explained, nearly every young seedling gets consumed, which impedes the growth of new trees and can cause otherwise common native species to become practically rare. Some of these species include: northern red oak, shagbark hickory, white pine, pitch pine, and eastern hemlock.

The group was shown examples of the exclosure work done by the late Bruce Bonta, who purchased the land in 1971 together with his wife, author and naturalist Marcia Bonta, who was also present for the hike.

The exclosure in Far Field was put up back in 1995 after Bruce and Marcia Bonta visted Latham's Acre in northcentral PA, an exclosure maintained since the 1940s. (to read the details of that visit please visit https://marciabonta.com/2000/05/01/lathams-acre/

"At the time (while speaking of the three-acre exclosure), Bruce walked quite a long distance, back and forth, surveying the property, after it was built," Marcia said, as part of the initial effort to inventory everything in it. He found a large patch of rattlesnake plantain, among other species, she added.

Bruce's initial vision for the preservation and stewardship of the property set the stage for sons Dave, Mark, and Steve, along with property manager Eric Oliver to continue his efforts.

"Issuing hunting permits each year has been one of the primary ways we've tried to keep the deer population from getting too large," said Dave.

The group was asked to look at the overall land in front of them, to see and experience the difference between the enclosed landscape and the immediate grounds outside the exclosure. The results were striking, showing many young saplings thriving on one side, while the landscape on the other side appeared to be largely devoid of greenery – the exclosure indeed made a remarkable difference, the group noted.

Additional species of trees and plants benefiting and thriving from reduced deer browsing were pointed out to the group throughout the four-hour hike, including: mapleleaf vibernum (right), chestnut, pawpaw, witch-hazel, and downy rattlesnake orchids, just to name a few.

There was also a lot of discussion along the hike about invasive plant species, like Japanese stiltgrass, and mile-a-minute, a fast-growing aggressive vine from Asia, that grows quickly to smother and kill native plants. Efforts to help eradicate it from the property are ongoing. The first volunteer work day to start the difficult removal process took place on August 30.

"With the newly-formed Friends of Plummer's Hollow group, the hope is to further enlist the help of people who are passionate about preserving the natural local environment for future generations," added Eric Oliver, caretaker.

Upcoming event:

Tyrone Golden Eagle Watch Party

November 27

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

please send an email to:
plummershollow@gmail.com
if you plan to attend





Photos by Amy Christina



Contact Information:

- **Friends Group**
  P.O. Box 68, Tyrone, PA
  plummershollow@gmail.com
  call or text 814-600-8394
- **Newsletter Editor**
  Amy Christina,
  amychristina.me@gmail.com
  next deadline: 12/1/26